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## **What do MBA, MLB, and AT&T have in common? a dynamic off-campus application**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This Application was designed for undergraduate and graduate marketing management classes. Its premise is to ensure that students receive not only sufficient grounding in theory, but also an opportunity to apply their classroom learning in a marketing rich business environment. AT&T Park, home of the San Francisco Giants, a Major League Baseball (MLB) team, provides one forum for experiencing the marketing concepts that are taught to MBA and BA marketing students. From the branded cup holders in the stadium seats, to the corporate sponsored luxury suites, to the advertisements on the Jumbotron scoreboard, the students are inundated with branding, logos, advertising, public relations, pricing schemes and countless other examples of marketing. This off-campus Application brings marketing to life in a way that cannot be accomplished through lectures, case discussions and projects. There are several goals for this Application. The first is to anchor the key marketing concepts discussed throughout the course. The second is to apply those concepts in a real world environment. The third goal is to provide the experience for students to synthesize what they have learned into a well organized and analytical deliverable in the form of a reflection and research paper. As the marketing industry continues to evolve and reinvent itself, it is important to prepare marketing students to effectively use and understand the tactics, strategies and ideas that comprise this discipline. This Application successfully provides students with an integrative experience for their Marketing Management or Principles of Marketing classes.

Keywords: Strategic Marketing, Application, Brand Management, Advertising, Baseball, Sports Marketing

## INTRODUCTION

This Application, based around a field site visit to AT&T Park, was designed for undergraduate Principles of Marketing and graduate level Marketing Management classes. The premise behind this Application is to ensure that students receive not only sufficient grounding in theory, but also an opportunity to apply their classroom learning in a marketing rich business environment.

Textbooks, readings, and in-class lectures, traditionally cover marketing theory, for undergraduate and graduate students. Students often have the opportunity to practice what they learn through participating in a variety of in-class exercises, analyzing mini cases, or, for MBA students, Harvard Business School cases or the equivalent. The challenge for professors is to find methods that bring the marketing material to life beyond the scope of the classroom. A number of useful approaches include: bringing in guest speakers from industry, creating experiential exercises, and developing a marketing plan for a real organization. These methods are effective, but are restricted by the physical limitations of the university classroom. However, by providing students the opportunity to go into a stimulating business environment brings marketing to life in a way that cannot be accomplished in the classroom.

There are several goals for this Application. The first is to anchor the key marketing concepts from lectures, textbook readings, and cases. The second is to apply those concepts in a real world environment. The third goal is to provide the experience for students to synthesize what they have learned into a well organized and analytical deliverable. Finally, the student deliverable provides the instructor with an excellent measurement tool for accessing what the students have learned throughout the semester.

The Application can be used for a variety of marketing courses, including:

- Marketing Management
- Principles of Marketing
- Branding
- Advertising
- Strategic Management
- Consumer Behavior
- Sales Management
- Specialized Elective

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The breadth and depth of marketing is often difficult for students to fully embrace before they complete a marketing course. This lack of knowledge is often based on students viewing the most visible aspects of marketing, advertising and sales, as the whole of what marketing entails. It is important for students to learn the language of marketing, the various components of marketing, and how marketing interacts with the other functional areas within an organization. Furthermore, marketing, as a dynamic and changing discipline, is best learned through grounding in the classroom and experienced in the world of business.

An additional challenge is that marketing is a required cognate for an undergraduate degree in business and for the MBA. As such, non-marketing majors may lack enthusiasm and genuine interest in the topic. Typically, marketing majors are in the minority. As such, some students may believe that the subject matter does not warrant purchasing textbooks or that power

point slides and lectures will suffice (Ferrell and Gonzalez, 2004). Even though the students make the minimal investment in the class and yet are still demanding as consumers of the class and higher education in general.

Despite this apathetic attitude towards marketing, students expect to be entertained in order to learn. They also demand more than lectures and power point slides alone from the professor (Ferrell and Gonzalez, 2004). In fact, students are much more willing to challenge and question the professor. In order to engage this somewhat disinterested yet challenging student, professors must keep their lessons relevant, sophisticated and entertaining. For instance, to fully engross the students, case studies must be up-to-date (within the last three years) and readily applicable to students' work lives. Guest lecturers must be leaders in their industries and engaging speakers. PowerPoint presentations cannot be expected to take the place of robust classroom projects and discussions. More than ever before, the professor is challenged with keeping the classroom lessons and experiences fresh and engrossing.

Through lectures, readings, discussions, in-class exercises, and this Application, a marketing course can be designed to:

- Introduce students to essential marketing concepts and theories
- Help students understand decisions associated with the marketing mix
- Enhance students' capabilities to apply marketing concepts and theories
- Improve students' skills for diagnosing, analyzing, and making marketing decisions
- Excite students about the field of marketing

Based on the continuing demands to make the marketing curriculum more challenging and relevant to today's students, the development of this Application is based on the following approach to the class:

- Presenting theory through lectures, in class projects and class discussions
- Practicing marketing techniques and strategies through case analysis
- Applying concepts and theories through a field site visit
- Reflecting and analyzing what was learned through writing a reflection/research paper

This approach is well grounded in theories of learning and the literature about creating an effective learning environment. In Mark Smith's article, "David A. Kolb on Experiential Learning", he describes Kolb's model of experiential education saying that "deeper learning runs through a cycle of concrete experiences, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation" (Smith 2001).

According to Smith, KOLB'S Model can be described as follows:

- "Experiencing – these are activities from which a student may learn (readings, field work, lab work, problem sets, observations, simulations/games).
- Reflecting – the student thinks about the experience (what was seen, felt, thought about) and integrates the new experience with past experiences. (Keeping a journal or log through your work term will help with this process.)
- Generalizing – the student develops questions and theories and attaches meaning to the experience.
- Applying – the student tests out new ideas, attitudes and behaviors and the cycle continues" (Smith 2001).

The Application described in this article, allows students to experience all four of Kolb's Elements of Experiential Learning. Furthermore, Kolb's model of experiential learning can be combined with the works of Gonzalez, Ingram et al. who state that more and more faculty members are moving away from the standard model of teaching and embracing a "learning oriented perspective" (Gonzalez, Ingram et al. 2004).

"In a teaching oriented perspective the focal point of the class is the teacher while the student passively receives the information presented by the teacher. A learning oriented perspective requires a shift in focus to the student and the active acquisition of knowledge and understanding and the development skills of the student. In contrasting these two approaches, the teaching oriented perspective casts the teacher as the "sage on the stage" or the "provider of knowledge" "knowledge expert", while the learning oriented professor fulfills the role of "guide by the side" or "facilitator of learning" or "learning coach" (Gonzalez, Ingram et al. 2004).

As such, faculty members may wish to develop learning goals from a student-centered perspective. The professors may rethink how they structure and teach the class to include the following learning objectives for the students. Learning as such is:

- Fundamentally about making and maintaining connections.
- Enhanced by taking place in the context of a compelling situation, allowing for contemplation and reflection.
- An active search for meaning by the learner by constructing knowledge shaped by experience.
- A cumulative and developmental process involving the whole person.
- Strongly affected by the educational climate in which it takes place.
- Dependent on frequent feedback to be sustained, practice to be nourished, and opportunities to use what has been learned.
- Often takes place beyond the classroom.
- About transferring knowledge and skills to new and different contexts.

In fact, subject-matter knowledge is gained and enhanced through a broad range of experiences and associations applied to real world problems. Gonzalez and Ingram et al. refers to this as "building social capital" in the classroom. They contend that given the professors' objectives, "they must build a compelling context in which the students can learn in a creative and, what has been a nontraditional environment." They believe that the professor can create a learning environment and build social capital in the classroom by: "creating active connections among students; building trust with students; establishing shared value with students; and providing equitable opportunities for students."

In this environment, the role of the professor "goes from being an expert who imparts knowledge to individual students to a facilitator of action to assist students in developing important skills and capabilities" (Gonzalez and Ingram et al. 2001). Providing equitable opportunities for students is especially important and relevant to this Application since students learn in a variety of ways. The experience of getting out of the classroom to feel, see, touch, and perhaps, taste a different business environment not only enhances the learning experience but imprints the learning in the students' minds. This creates an equitable learning environment for students to learn in a variety of ways.

Studies show that all aspects of our environment contribute to the learning process and thus a total learning environment would place equal value on the students, faculty and physical environment. This is known as the “holistic” learning process (Adrian & Palmer, 1999). In order for students to fully understand the concepts presented in the Principles of Marketing and Marketing Management classes, it is important that the students experience marketing in action. Experiencing all of the richness that marketing entails requires the professor to take the students out of the classroom and see the marketing implemented in the business world. Developments in the ever-changing field of marketing can often make traditional classroom lessons seem stagnant.

Students who participate in a “holistic” learning process are said to think beyond memorization, and can make improved links between theory and practice as taught by the professor. In-line with the “holistic” learning process, the AT&T Application explains how the field site visit helps to synthesize the Marketing Management course or Principles of Marketing course materials for the students. The nature of the field site visit, allows for lessons to be that much more effective and stronger than if taught within the classroom (Adrian & Palmer, 1999). Incorporating a field site visit into the curriculum of a course excites and helps students be more engaged and, theoretically, learn more.

## **APPLICATION**

Observing the integration of marketing theory and practices within an organization is extremely valuable. One of the main challenges of preparing the Application was to find a venue where marketing was prevalent, exciting and well executed. As such, certain criteria were considered when choosing an organization. For example, the organization had to be relevant to the students and, if possible, an established institution in the city or town. The chosen organization had to provide a strong brand image and numerous examples of marketing at work.

Listed below are venues that have been used in the past for this Application:

- Museums
- Wineries
- Community based clinic or blood banks
- Municipal organizations
- Sports venues
- High-tech companies
- Theatres

The location should also be easily accessible for the students so that they may either drive or take public transportation. It is also important that the Application be completed within four to eight hours in a single day. The organization should provide not only a behind-the-scenes tour, but a presentation from either a CEO, someone at the VP level or a marketing director. It is imperative that the speaker is prepared to give a high level presentation and be able to engage students in a quality Q&A session.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

The specific learning objectives for the Application are the following:

- Secure greater engagement of students in the topics covered in the course.
- Offer students the opportunity to experience marketing in action.



- Provide marketing experts to discuss the specific marketing tactics and strategies of their organization.
- Make students more aware of the importance of marketing within an organization.
- Broaden the students' perspective of marketing elements and how they play out within a marketing oriented organization.
- Create excitement about marketing for those students who may have had a limited or negative view of marketing.

### **Why AT&T Park?**

AT&T Park, home of the San Francisco Giants Major League Baseball (MLB) team, was chosen for the location of the Application because it fit the above criteria. Furthermore, baseball and the Park itself represent an industry, which is familiar and relatable to almost all students. The venue also provides the opportunity for baseball fans, those students at least familiar with baseball, and students with no baseball knowledge, such as foreign students, to experience a San Francisco landmark as well as an American tradition.

The Giants are one of the oldest teams in the MLB and have been in California since 1957, after moving west from New York City. The MLB is the organization that oversees all Major League Baseball teams. The MLB operates under two divisions, the American League and the National League, which includes the Giants.

AT&T Park provides the optimal forum for experiencing the marketing principles and strategies that are taught to MBA and BA marketing students. The AT&T Park Marketing Department, as well as that of Giants, Inc., has managed to brand both the team and the stadium as separate entities. For example, students learn that AT&T Park is more than just the home of the San Francisco Giants, but rather an entertainment venue that has hosted everything from motor cross-sporting events to the San Francisco Opera.

### **PREPARATION**

Undertaking an off-campus Application requires a great deal of upfront preparation on the part of the professor and the chosen organization. Ideally, the professor should contact the organization at least a semester in advance of the site visit. Sometimes it requires making multiple contacts before an appropriate venue can be found, the right speakers lined up and a date agreed upon that matches the organization and students' availability.

The following describes the preparation required by the faculty, students and organization.

#### **Faculty**

There are numerous steps that the professor needs to perform in order to prepare for an Application of this nature. The first step is meeting with the legal department at the university to learn if any waivers are needed due to the off-campus aspect of the Application. The next step is establishing contact and developing a relationship with the organization of choice.

The professor should then meet with someone within the chosen organization to determine the following:

- Will a student visit to the organization support the learning objectives of the course?
- Can the organization provide someone at a high-level to give a presentation to the students?
- Does the organization have well trained tour guides who can answer student questions?
- Will the organization provide a behind-the-scenes tour and not just a standard visitors tour?
- What, if any, charge there will be for the tour and speaker?
- How many hours is the organization willing to have the students on-site?

The professor needs to inform the students of the following prior to the Application:

- The students need to make their own transportation arrangements, such as carpooling or public transit to the venue.
- Any students who cannot attend will be asked to complete an alternative assignment.
- Any student who cannot afford the Application should speak to the professor privately, who will make arrangements for them.
- The students are expected to participate for the entire Application and cannot use their communication devices while on-site.
- The trip will be scheduled on a non-class day.
- Professional behavior is expected of the students.
- Students should be prepared to take notes on the visit.
- Students should develop four marketing related questions they would like answered on the visit and email to the professor a week in advance.
- The professor will consolidate these questions into a manageable list of 10 to 15 questions and email them to the organizational contact.

The professor can decide which topics to discuss in class prior to the Application depending upon the specific goals for the Application and the course. Based on the AT&T Park Application, the following topics were discussed prior to the trip:

- Marketing Mix
- Branding
- Marketing research
- Segmentation, targeting and positioning
- Integrated marketing communication
- Customer relationship management
- Customer service
- Pricing models, such as dynamic pricing
- Corporate sponsorship

## **Students**

Students should complete the following prior to the Application:



- Visit the Giants, MLB, and AT&T Park websites and familiarize them with each one.
- Read assigned articles about sports and event marketing.
- Prepare four marketing related questions and email to the professor.

## **Organization**

The organization should be prepared to provide the following:

- A speaker at the CEO, VP or marketing director level to give a presentation to the students.
- Tour guides who have been prepped with the student questions.
- A behind-the-scenes tour and not just a standard visitors tour.
- Information regarding costs, for the tour, lunch or other amenities.
- The optimal number of hours spent on-site in order to meet the learning objectives.

## **MEASURING THE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

The objective behind creating this Application was to secure greater engagement from the students on topics covered in class by providing real world marketing examples. A trip of this nature, allows students to learn from the experience and apply their knowledge. Students are also able to demonstrate how well they've mastered the subject matter covered in the course. By taking students out of the classroom and into a more dynamic marketing environment, they become more aware of, and recognize the use of, marketing strategies by organizations.

There are several metrics utilized to determine whether the learning objectives were met. During the Q & A sessions, there is always a distinct added level of sophistication to the questions over those that were originally submitted. Student questions become much more detailed, strategically based and analytical. Throughout the trip, students are active and fully participative in all aspects of the tour, discussion and Q&A session. Their enthusiasm is evident by the depth of their questions, attention, and professional behavior when dealing with the tour guides and guest speakers.

As a post trip evaluation, students are required to complete a six to eight page reflection and research paper incorporating their visit to the venue and associated marketing strategies. The range of the students analytical analysis include the use of marketing terms, strategies and tactics as well as insights about the venue and marketing in general. As part of the paper, students are asked to conduct research about an area that particularly piqued their interest during the visit. For the AT&T Park Application, students have performed in-depth analysis on topics, including: ballpark financing, dynamic pricing, player contracts, ballpark advertising revenues, operations, and comparisons with other ballparks.

## **Sample Paper Format**

For professors, the deliverable can be tailored in any fashion that they deem appropriate. The format for the AT&T Park Application paper is displayed below:

- Introduction: Student's previous experience with baseball, AT&T Park, sports marketing, or sports in the U.S. or home country as appropriate. (Set the stage.)
- Summary: First reaction to the Park if first visit. List reactions to what the student saw, heard, experienced and learned even if a regular visitor to the park. Any surprises? What else would the student have liked to learn?
- Marketing: This can also be incorporated in section above. What evidence of marketing did was experienced? What did the student learn? What class, text, case, article or book material came through at AT&T Park? Does this make the student more or less interested in sports marketing? What specific evidence did of marketing strategies and tactics was displayed at the venue?
- Area of Strong Interest: What was the most interesting? Why? Conduct in-depth research and write about the importance of this particular aspect, strategy or marketing tactic. Be sure to cite references.
- Some possible paper topics include, but in no way are limited to:
  - Advertising
  - Giants brand
  - AT&T brand
  - Cross promotions
  - Partner marketing
  - Vendors
  - Use of new media
  - Marketing strategies and techniques specific to sports marketing
  - New pricing methods
  - Co-branding
  - CRM: Customer Relationship Management
- Conclusion: What was the biggest take-away from the tour and guest speaker(s)? What about from the Park itself? How did this field trip support or reinforce learnings from class? What are some marketing concepts, tactics, strategies, and nuances that the student will pay attention to in the future?

After submitting their papers to the professor, it is recommended that the class engage in a debriefing of the experience. Discussions tend to be analytical, tactical, and enthusiastic.

## CONCLUSION

Marketing is a discipline that requires action. Often, it is difficult for students to completely grasp the complexity and importance of marketing strategies without actually seeing them applied in the business world. The primary objective of this Application was to secure greater engagement of the students in various marketing strategies and tactics by providing an opportunity for the students to see them in action.

While this Application afforded the students an opportunity for greater engagement, it also made the students more aware of the prevalence and difference among the marketing strategies that businesses utilize daily.

AT&T Park, as a venue for this Application, exposed students to multiple examples of marketing principles at work. From the branded cup holders in the stadium seats, to the corporate

sponsored luxury suites, to the advertisements on the Jumbotron scoreboard, the students were inundated with branding, logos, advertising, public relations, pricing schemes and more.

As the marketing industry as a whole continues to evolve and reinvent itself, it is important to prepare marketing students to effectively use and understand the tactics, strategies and ideas that comprise this industry. This Application successfully provides the students with an integrative experience for their marketing management class, broadens the students' perspective of marketing elements, and creates excitement about the field of marketing. What do MBA, MLB and AT&T Park have in Common? A dynamic off-campus Application!

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